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2019

## Closed Loop

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### Recommended Citation

Brake, Madison, "Closed Loop" (2019). *Knight Terror*. 13.  
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/horrorshort/13>



## Closed Loop

by

Madison Brake

Brianna had seen a book at the Hitt library the other day that she couldn't get out of her mind: acid green with a clover stamped on its side. She couldn't *exactly* remember what it was about but she *had* made a mental note to check it out. She had a few minutes before class—just enough to grab it.

Now she hunted down the section she remembered it sitting in, prowling down the aisle. She scanned names of authors, passing Adams, Adellen, Allens. Not what she needed. She searched through B's, C's, D's and on. Nope. It had come later, she was strangely certain.

She pressed on, down the winding, dusty aisle. Had she walked this far before? It didn't feel right. But wait—she'd seen that faded red book with the gold lettering and the leaf-embossed spine. This had to be right.

She checked the time on her phone. 1:53. Still enough time.

She picked up her pace, trying to move quickly and quietly. Even on the carpeted floor, she felt like her steps rang too loud, the sound shattering the quiet. She felt like every book on the shelf was bristling at the disturbance, like she'd woken someone.

That was stupid. No one had been around when she'd entered the section. She could walk as loudly as she wanted.

She pressed on. She had a feeling that the name had begun with an M. McClellan maybe? McPearson? But the M's came and went with no sign of the book. There seemed to be awful lot of M's, come to think of it. And N's.

Reaching the end of the row, she turned to the next aisle, moving quicker this time, skimming the titles. She felt strangely like someone was waiting on her, watching her. She imagined how she must look: a hunch-backed student power-walking too quickly down the aisle to actually be paying attention to the books. Self-conscious, she reached for her phone to check the time. The last thing she wanted was to have to run because she hadn't kept track.

Her phone read 1:53. It could *not* still be 1:53. She studied the tiny seconds hand on the digital clock face. She watched it loop past the 12 once, then twice. The time did not change. It must be broken. She could be late already.

She turned and was startled to see that she'd come a lot farther than she'd thought. Panicked, she started running. A monitor could yell at her if they wanted. She turned the corner of the aisle and found—

Another long stretch of books with no sign of the walkway. She ran down it, turned another corner. More books. More books. Nothing but books. She shouted but no one answered. She tried to text her friend Sarah but there was no signal.

Silent, the books sat on the shelves and watched as she ran up and down endless aisles. Silent, they watched when she finally collapsed.